

## Fashion on Coins I: Beards

By Carol Schwyzer, © MoneyMuseum

"A beard makes a man likeable," some people say. "Anyone who sports a beard has something to hide," say others, while there are those who "swear by the prophet's beard." But one thing is certain: a strong growth of beard is a visible sign of masculinity and potency, as it occurs after puberty has set in.

In ancient Rome the young men consecrated their first shave to the gods to gain their protection in adult life. Because of its continuous growth the beard became the symbol of vitality as well. But it also served as a physical signal with which a man can express his personality and standing.

Whether curled, growing without restriction, cut short and twisted or clean-shaven – at any rate having a beard or being shaven is tied up with the respective culture and epoque, with social circumstances and fashion trends. This is reflected in the portraits of the powerful on their coins, as this picture tour shows.

## The beard as a symbol of divine omnipotence



Stater, minted by the Greek city of Elis, Olympia, 363-343 BC

In the Greek conception of the world inside and outside, ideas and material corporality are mutually conditional. The beauty of the soul corresponds to the beauty of the body.

The head on this coin belongs to Zeus, the father of the gods. His divine power is revealed in the full head of hair and in the copious growth of his beard. It is the beard that generally signals masculinity, reproductive capacity and power. Moreover, in Greek mythology the beard was regarded as the seat of wisdom and life. To testify to the truthfulness of his statement anyone swearing an oath placed his hand on the beard of a Zeus statue.

The die cutter of this wonderful coin has deliberately given form to the hair and beard. Thus the image has received the status of divine omnipotence by idealising exaggeration.

## A hero even without a beard



Drachm, minted under the Macedonian king Alexander III the Great (336-323 BC), Sardis, around 334-323 BC

That the hero Hercules appears on this coin of Alexander the Great without a beard in spite of divine descent, in spite of proven strength and masculinity has practical reasons. In the wars against the Persians it was discovered that beardlessness was a strategic advantage. For the long beards had enabled the Persians to grasp their opponents by their beards and then kill them. After, short hair and beards had become popular between 480 and 490 BC, Alexander III ordered his troops to shave off their beards altogether before the Battle of Arbela in 332 BC.

It goes without saying that Alexander kept his hair rather short as an example and was clean-shaven. With his achievements – victory over India and the conquest of India – it would never have occurred to anyone to deny his superhuman abilities. Also, precisely because of his nakedness, the determination and sensuality of the attractive face caught everyone's eye.

## An early Picasso



**Stater (imitation of a Philip stater), minted by the Celtic tribe of the Parisii, end of the 2nd century BC**

Modern long before modern times, the strongly stylised head on the Celtic coin has its effect. It is inspired by the staters of Philip II of Macedonia (359-336 BC) and displays an Apollo head. The god of light, of the arts and reason does not traditionally have a beard. His hair seems to be three dimensional and to form a huge mane. That is reminiscent of the fashion of the Celts, who covered their hair with lime so that it stood up and presented itself as a wild, frizzy hair style.

The Celtic tribe of the Parisii, who lived in several settlements on the banks and islands of the Seine, gave this stater its name. The Roman historian Livius (59 BC-17 AD) characterised the Celts as being driven by a strong impetus and impatience. Their strikingly colourful clothes were dismissed by the Roman republicans as vain.

Maybe it was here that the later fashion consciousness of the French royal courts emerged. This Celtic Apollo at any rate radiates great artistic fashion consciousness and a kind of more or less Parisian extravagance and elegance.

## A truly imperial beard



**Aureus, minted under the Roman emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD), Rome, 128 AD**

This fine beard belongs to Hadrian, the first Roman emperor to have himself depicted on a coin with a beard. So gone were the days when a right-wing republican-minded Roman had to be clean-shaven according to the ideas of the senate.

Hadrian, born in Spain, was educated, had many interests, reformed the administrative structure of his empire and secured its borders. His preference for Hellenism was also expressed in his appearance, as the well-kept beard covered not only some unsightly scars, it was also the sign of admiration for the traditionally bearded Greek philosophers. The wealth of his hair additionally signalled the physical fitness of a man who in full armour often marched with his soldiers and indefatigably travelled throughout his extensive empire.

Like all powerful people, Hadrian, too, set a fashionable example. His beard fashion was adopted by the Roman upper class and remained up into the time of the Severus emperors in the 3rd century.

## An unrestrained growth of beard as a sign of the revolutionary?



Solidus, minted under the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (685-695), Constantinople, 692

In the East Roman, or Byzantine, Empire the Imperium Romanum lived on, although under the sign of a new religion. The founder of Christianity was a charismatic outsider, a kind of revolutionary: Jesus Christ opposed the unyielding laws of the scribes and Pharisees and preached a simple life characterised by love of one's neighbour.

Justinian II, a deeply religious ruler, placed Christ on the obverse of his coin. The son of God displays on it a long beard, largely in its natural state and divided on the chin – exactly corresponding to the report in which the governor Letulus described the new messiah to Emperor Tiberius. The long hair reaching down to the shoulders expresses naturalness and shows that this man ignores conventions. The luxuriant beard may here additionally symbolise the wisdom of the ruler over the world.

Justinian II has modestly placed himself on the reverse of the coin and has a short-cut, stylised beard. After all, a genuine ruler also has to make an orderly impression – order promises the citizens security.

## Beard styles as an expression of individuality



Teston, iminted under the French king Francis I (1515-1547), Lyon, around 1540

In the Middle Ages, geared towards the hereafter, the ruler either did not appear at all on the coin or only in a stylised form as the largely abstract embodiment of the rulers' principle. Then the Renaissance discovered this life on earth anew and moved mankind to the centre of the conception of the world.

Hair and beards supported the individual expression and became a means of presenting oneself. The Renaissance was familiar with a variety of beards, as every individual could decide for himself how he wanted to draw attention to his virility. Men could be close-shaven if they wanted to, especially if they were young. The ruler at the pinnacle of his power, however, usually preferred to carefully shape his beard.

For example, Francis I, the first French Renaissance king, has a wreath-shaped beard combined with a narrow moustache. This shape of beard also adorned the English king Henry VIII (1491-1547). It gives the impression of being manly and because of its neat appearance at the same cultivated, with a hint of vanity. So it was thoroughly suitable for the knight-king Francis I, who, on the one hand, crushed the Confederate troops at Marignano and, on the other, fetched Leonardo da Vinci to his court.

## Whoever has power makes the fashion



Ducaton, minted under the Savoy duke Charles Emmanuel I (1580-1630), 1588

In the 16th century Spain had acquired world power under Charles V (1519-1556). A large quantity of silver flowed from the new colonies abroad to the mother country. And whoever has political and economic power attracts attention. Thus the Spanish court determined the entire European fashion of that time.

Charles Emmanuel I, duke of Savoy, whose father, Emmanuel Philibert, had served under Charles V, here has a pointed beard over the Spanish ruff, which emphasises the narrow silhouette of its wearer and his distinguished personality. Resulting from the high collar the prince keeps his hair short. On account of his stoutness, it suggests vitality and victor qualities. The extension of his brows by the hairstyle signalises intelligence. The beard strengthens the chin and thus expresses a strong will. All these distinctive features had been proved by the prince, as in 1588, when Charles Emmanuel had this ducaton minted in Turin, he succeeded in snatching the county of Saluzzo from the king of France.

The extent to which Charles Emmanuel here presented himself is, however, only short-lived. No later than the following year, the French king, Henry IV, conquered Savoyard territory.

## The beardless Baroque



Taler, minted under the Roman-German emperor Charles VI (1711-1740), Wroclaw, 1718

The term "baroque" is derived from the Portuguese word "barocco" and means an irregularly formed pearl. Movement, ornaments, reflections characterise the art of the Baroque, which became the decisive style in the 17th and 18th centuries. But, in the matter of fashion, the French court had set the tone since Louis XIV (1643-1715).

In 1680 the Sun King had shaved off his beard and made the clean-shaven chin modern for 150 years. Anyway, a bearded appearance would not have been in keeping with the waving curls of the full-bottomed wig, which was now a must in fashion. On this coin Charles VI impresses us with a fine specimen. Adorned by this lion's mane, the emperor himself radiates masculinity and strength even without a beard. At the same time the picture of the last male Hapsburg clearly shows on this taler that even a naked chin can express resoluteness and defiance, for without a beard you can see the facial play better.

The emperor in whose period of rule the art of the Baroque reached its zenith was in fact provided with some powers of self-assertion. With the Pragmatic Sanction he achieved the permissibility of female succession in favour of his daughter Maria Theresa.

## An emperor with a goatee



100 francs, minted under the French emperor Napoleon III (1852-1870), Paris, 1869

In one way Napoleon III was a child of the French Revolution. As Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, he was elected president of the Republic by the people in 1848. Shortly afterwards he achieved autocracy by means of a coup d'état: in 1851 as "prince president," in 1852 as emperor, since he had succeeded in achieving the reintroduction of imperial rule by a plebiscite.

On the coin the emperor has short hair – ever since the revolution the court wig had been old fashioned – and a waxed moustache in which a beard is combined with a twisted moustache. This style of beard, also called an "Osirian beard," is reminiscent of ancient Egypt, which had come into fashion through Napoleon I's campaigns. But it also recalls the beard of a goat. Napoleon III's sexual activity was in keeping with this. His marriage to the Spanish beauty Eugénie de Montijo turned unhappy as a result of his numerous affairs.

## A beard is a matter of discipline



1 rupee, minted under the German emperor Wilhelm II (1888-1918) for German East Africa, Berlin, 1890

The last German emperor, Wilhelm II, wears a uniform, a helmet with the imperial eagle and a twisted moustache on the coin. To keep this twirl, which Wilhelm I had already made fashionable, in good form extreme discipline was required. At night, to cultivate the beard, a bandage or a moustache trainer had to be worn. Wilhelm II's court hairdresser, François Hardy, even created a special tincture to provide the ends of the beard that were sticking up with the necessary stability.

The 19th century was the century of national states, of imperialism and the bourgeoisie. In imitating the monarchical form of beard the citizens displayed proof of their loyalty to the emperor, political affiliation and a conformity, which they felt in their bones.

## The king – a man like any other



2 euros, minted under the Spanish king Juan Carlos (since 1975), Madrid, 2001

Juan Carlos Alfonso Victor María de Borbón y Borbón-Dos Sicilias has been the king of Spain since 22nd November 1975. He was involved in ending Franco's dictatorship and introduced democracy into Spain. The monarch's image on this euro reflects his democratic modesty, as most present-day European royal dynasties do. Juan Carlos appears without a beard, with carefully combed hair and wearing a suit and tie. Thus the king is in the uniform of the established business and financial world – from his appearance he might even be a banker.

The democratisation of fashion in hair and clothes began with the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Sewing and cutting machines made ready-to-wear clothing for the masses possible, and with the mechanical Gillette shaver everyone could shave himself daily.

In the age of physical culture and enthusiasm for sport beardlessness stands for a modern lifestyle. Men with beards, on the other hand, tend to be regarded as unconventional, old-fashioned or even retarded. They are either artists like Salvador Dalí, revolutionary leaders like Fidel Castro or fundamentalists like Ayatollah Khomeini. Or television stars like Don Johnson, who made the three-day beard fashionable with the cult series *Miami Vice*.